

Focus On

What Works

Learning While Female (Women and Girls)

Women and girls have made such tremendous progress in education, it's hard to believe that in the first half of the 20th century, colleges and universities could openly exclude or limit the number of female students. The passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (recognizing that girls and boys hold the rights to equal educational opportunities) put an end to such overt displays of gender bias. Yet, much remains to be done, for the evidence shows that minority girls are dropping out of high school at alarming rates, sexual harassment and bullying are on the rise, and women are still underrepresented in fields that would lead them and their families out of poverty.

Restore Title IX Protections

Much of the underrepresentation young women face in education today is in traditionally male areas of technical education, athletics, and the hard sciences. Even though girls continue to battle the legacy of discrimination and sex segregation in these areas, in 2006 the Department of Education weakened long-standing Title IX regulatory protections to make it easier for schools to once again

segregate male and female students. Women's organizations across the country are encouraging the current Administration to restore the original Title IX regulatory protections.

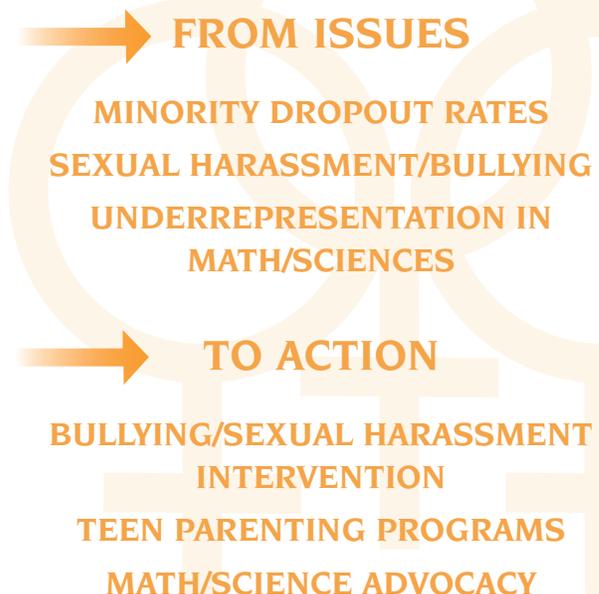
When Girls Don't Graduate

Though much of the spotlight in recent years has been on boys' academic attainment, one in four students dropping out of high school today is female. Girls of color are at particular risk: a 2009 report released by the National Women's Law Center and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund reveals that the statistics for Latinas are especially stark. Failure to obtain a high school diploma has particularly steep consequences for girls. Female dropouts have higher rates of unemployment and earn significantly lower wages compared to their male peers. Schools can help reduce dropout rates by designing targeted interventions; providing additional support for pregnant and parenting students; ensuring girls have equal access to career and technical education for high-skill, high-wage jobs; and protecting students from sexual harassment and bullying.

HOT TOPIC

The New Face of Bullying

Research shows that during middle and high school, girls bully more than boys. In fact, girls cyberbully—use cell phones and the Internet to send and post cruel messages and threats—twice as often as boys. Lack of face-to-face confrontation makes cyberbullying a favored tactic of many girls; and it's this anonymity that often makes cyber bullies more vicious than in-person bullies. After 13-year-old Megan Meier was driven to suicide by a cyberbullying hoax in 2006, Arkansas passed a law allowing school officials to take action against cyber bullies even if the bullying did not originate or take place on school property.



WHAT'S WORKING

1 Increase in staff involvement leads to decrease in bullying and sexual harassment.

The key to preventing peer victimization in our schools is training for all stakeholders: teachers, support professionals, administrators, parents, and community leaders. NEA's Bullying and Sexual Harassment Prevention and Intervention Program (BSHPIP) provides such training to all members. In the past year, the BSHPIP held a focus group with Education Support Professionals seeking their input on designing materials and strategies specific to them. ESPs are often the first to encounter bullying/sexual harassment incidents, while also being the first confidants of the bullied. This proactive move by NEA will ensure the entire school community is involved in addressing this growing national concern.

2 Teen parenting program aids graduation rates.

Project Opportunity provides counseling, mentoring, and life training to girls in jeopardy of dropping out of high school. Project Opportunity is a high school completion program for pregnant and parenting young women at Bryant Adult Alternative High School in Fairfax, Virginia. The program is operated by Fairfax County Public Schools and was established with a grant from the Virginia Department of Education. Annually it serves 120-150 girls and about half graduate in a given year. In 1999 and again in 2003, Project Opportunity earned a PEPNet (Promising and Effective Practices Network) award from the National Youth Employment Coalition. It

is only one of two teen parenting programs to receive this award. Teen pregnancy and parenting programs took a big financial hit during the previous administration when programs were forced to consolidate or close. Many organizations are hoping that the current administration will re-energize the funding for those programs, given the rise in teen pregnancies since 2007.

3 Helping girls enjoy math and science expands their career goals.

Middle school is most often cited as the place where girls "lose interest" in math and science. The reasons for loss of interest are complex, but involve the messages girls get from peer groups, parents, and educators. Researchers say educators can take the following steps to counter these measures and promote math/science careers: 1) Be aware of your classroom presentation style, and attend workshops that make you aware of girls' perceptions and attitudes about math and science. 2) Support girls in their efforts to take science and math courses, especially advanced courses for older girls. 3) Encourage girls to be active participants in class projects and science experiments, not observers and note takers. 4) Mediate access to computer resources. 5) Offer equal opportunities for girls to participate in technology-oriented extracurricular activities, such as science and computer clubs. Visit www.nea.org/tools/15863.htm for a list of math and science resources for girls.

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

“We’re supposed to be popular, smart, but not too smart, stay thin, and be happy and cheerful at all times. Society puts a lot of pressure on girls to be perfect.”

—High School Girl
Maryland

“I feel girls can accomplish anything they want to—this is not a man’s world.”

—Middle School Girl
New Jersey

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